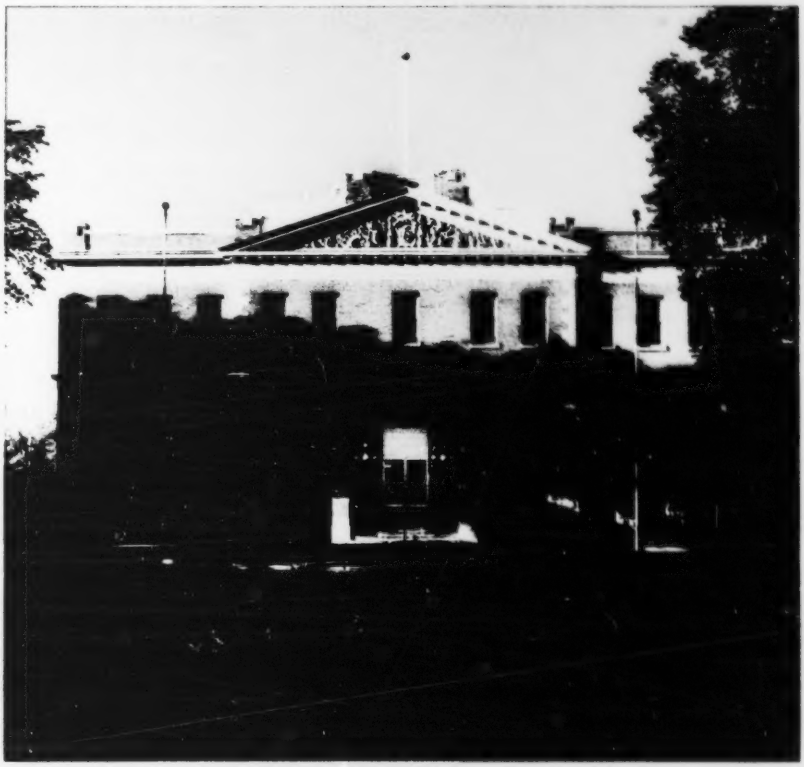
Brandon
Normal School



Manitoba

87-00097/

Manitoba
Culture, Heritage
and Recreation

© Historic Resources Branch

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Brandon Normal School

Cover title.
Bibliograph: p.
ISBN 0-7711-0104-X

1. Brandon Normal School—History.
2. Teachers colleges—Manitoba—Brandon.
3. Historic buildings—Manitoba—Brandon.
4. Brandon (Man.)—Buildings.
5. Hales, B.J. (Benjamin Jones), 1868- . I. Manitoba. Historic Resources Branch

LB1997.B72B72 1985 370.'7'30971273 C85-097309-0

BRANDON NORMAL SCHOOL

Introduction

The Brandon Normal School was established to provide southwestern Manitoba with teachers who were both conscious of the practical educational requirements of children from rural regions and conversant with the most up-to-date teaching methods. This facilitated the educationalists' goal to provide a consistent elementary school system across Manitoba which would create a cohesive society comprised of people from diverse backgrounds. In the early twentieth century observers believed that education would be the principal means by which a Manitoban, and Canadian identity, could be fashioned. John W. Dafoe, the influential editor of the *Manitoba Free Press,* stated:

> in a country like ours where so many nationalities are settling in our midst, it is imperative that the children of these different nationalities should be taught . . . the same aspirations, the same ideals of citizenship as our natural-born Canadians.

The Brandon Normal School, which opened in 1912, served as a teacher training centre for Brandon and the surrounding area for three decades. It played a vital role in providing teachers who were sympathetic to rural life, yet trained to inculcate the values required if a modern and dynamic society was to emerge in Manitoba. It was one of four grand buildings designed in Manitoba in the classical style to accommodate teacher training facilities. The other three Normal Schools in the Province included those in St. Boniface (1903), Manitou (1904-c.1940) and Winnipeg (1905). The former Brandon Normal School is one of three surviving buildings, as well as the only one remaining outside of Metropolitan Winnipeg, of the four original Normal School institutions erected in Manitoba between 1902 and 1912.

Benjamin J. Hales, (1868-1945) principal of the Brandon Normal School from 1911 to 1938, dominated the institution during most of the period it served as a teacher training facility. He shaped the school's commitment to provide well-trained teachers for rural regions. Hales was active in the field of education and well-known as a Manitoba author and naturalist. He contributed frequently on a variety of educational topics to the *Western School Journal.* Hales wrote three books on Manitoba flora and fauna including *Selected Western Flora,* published in 1915, which was endorsed for curriculum use in the High Schools and Collegiate Institutes of Manitoba by the Department of Education. Hales founded the B. J. Hales Museum of Natural History in 1913, an extensive collection of Manitoba fauna, now located in the A. E. McKenzie Building, Brandon University. He also studied and documented flora and fauna during the period when two prominent Manitobans, Ernest Thompson Seton, a world renowned naturalist and Dr. Frank Leith Skinner, a self-taught horticulturalist, made great advancements and contributions in the research of plant and animal life.

Teacher Training in Manitoba

When Manitoba entered Confederation in 1870 the educators and politicians decided that the first concern of the educational system should be to provide widespread education at the elementary level. No provision was made for teacher training; the Board of Education could only examine and license teachers—a shortcoming which soon became evident. The Superintendent of the Protestant schools glumly concluded in 1881 that although there were a few excellent teachers arriving in Manitoba

> there are many who have been failures elsewhere, and a number whose attainments are far from satisfactory . . . . At the last examination the ignorance displayed in reading and spelling, not to mention two other subjects, was most glaring. Teachers profess to know a great deal about Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, and so on; . . . and yet they can't express themselves correctly either in speaking or writing.

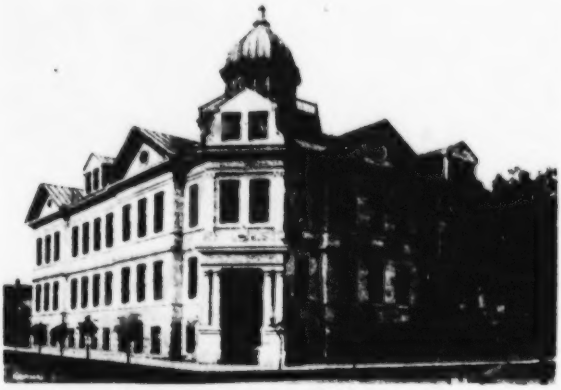
It was soon evident that in order to provide a sound education for Manitoba's children, an integrated system incorporating secondary and post-secondary education was required. Without efficient teachers, sound education at the elementary and secondary levels was impossible, and the future of Manitoba, which lay with its children, might well be blighted.

Consequently, in 1882, legislation was drafted which empowered the Protestant and Roman Catholic sections of the Board of Education to establish Normal Schools (teacher training colleges) in connection with the Protestant public schools in Winnipeg and the Roman Catholic public schools in St. Boniface. However, despite the introduction of teacher training facilities in Winnipeg and St. Boniface, rural areas of Manitoba experienced problems recruiting and retaining the services of teachers. Salaries were considered to be very low and many of the better qualified teachers viewed teaching as a stepping stone to other, better paid professions. Consequently, rural areas had great difficulty finding good teachers who were prepared to commit themselves to a school, and to a community, for an extended period of time.

The first attempt to solve this problem was the establishment of teacher training courses of four to six weeks duration at Normal Institutions which were organized at a number of rural centres throughout Manitoba. Classroom space was rented in communities such as Portage la Prairie, Manitou and Dauphin. The Brandon Institute opened in 1884, and the city soon became established as a teacher training centre. Manitoba's Normal Schools proclaimed three aims: to train teachers, to elevate the educational ideals of the people, and to assist in the formulation of an educational doctrine. The development of the Normal School system in Manitoba was one of evolution and adaptation to changing educational philosophy, and a response to the increasing educational requirements of children in urban and rural centres.

Normal Schools would, it was expected, prevent what was commonly referred to in the educational field as "the evils of mal-practise". Educators believed that with the proper professional training of teachers, accompanied by the necessary parental cooperation, the welfare of the school system and the children would be assured.

However, despite the establishment of regional institutes, the old problems of recruiting and retaining teachers for periods beyond one year, particularly in rural areas, persisted. In 1912 a new attempt was made to solve the problem in southwestern Manitoba by establishing a permanent Normal School in Brandon which would have its own premises, and which would be specifically designed to train teachers for a rural environment.



Winnipeg Normal School, c.1910

St. Boniface Normal School, c.1906

Manitou Normal School, c.1908

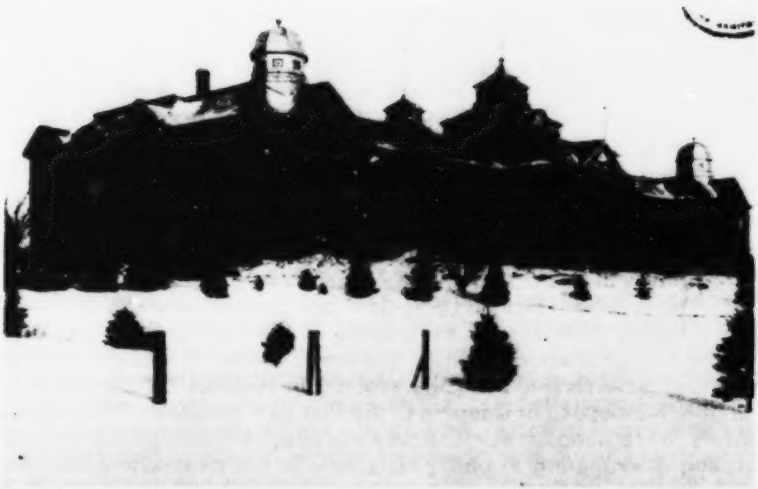
The Brandon Normal School was actually the last of four buildings constructed in Manitoba to house teacher training facilities in the decade prior to 1914. The Winnipeg Provincial Normal School, which was to serve as the headquarters for Manitoba's teacher training system for a period of forty years, moved into a new building in 1906; St. Boniface Normal School was constructed in 1903 and housed the French-speaking teacher training system until 1916; and the Manitou Normal School was built in 1904 (demolished c. 1940) to serve the requirements of southern Manitoba.

Brandon Normal School

The Brandon Normal School was designed by Victor W. Horwood, Provincial Architect from 1911 to 1916. Horwood was born at Frome, Somerset, England in 1878, moving as a child to Prescott, Ontario with his parents in 1884. After attending public schools, he entered the Collegiate Institute of Prescott, and subsequently studied art in New York. Choosing architecture as a career, he worked in Ottawa for E. L. Horwood until 1904 when he moved to Winnipeg. Horwood was to establish himself as one of the finest architects of the period, designing many of Winnipeg's most prominent buildings. Amongst his better known works are the St. Boniface City Hall (1905-1906), the Winnipeg Law Courts Building (1912-1916), the Agricultural Building, University of Manitoba (1912; now the Administration Building), as well as the Brandon Mental Health Centre (1912). In 1911 he was appointed Provincial Architect following the sudden death of Samuel Hooper. Horwood also served as the first vice-president of the Manitoba Associa-

tion of Architects, and was associated with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, retiring with the rank of Captain in 1913. He died at his home at Matlock in 1939 and was interred at Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg.

Victor W. Horwood, Architect of the Brandon Normal School



Brandon Mental Health Centre, 1912. Victor Horwood, Architect

The site for the Brandon Normal School, acquired by the Province for $12,000, had previously been used by the Patmore family for their nurseries. The building occupied blocks 20 and 21—a total of eleven acres—between 10th and 11th Streets, bounded by Queens Avenue to the south and Hill Avenue to the north. The general contractor for the structure, which was completed for a cost of $110,000, was the Brandon Construction Company. The plumbing and heating contract was awarded to Yates and Company of Brandon and the electrical wiring was installed by Boyd Electrical Company.

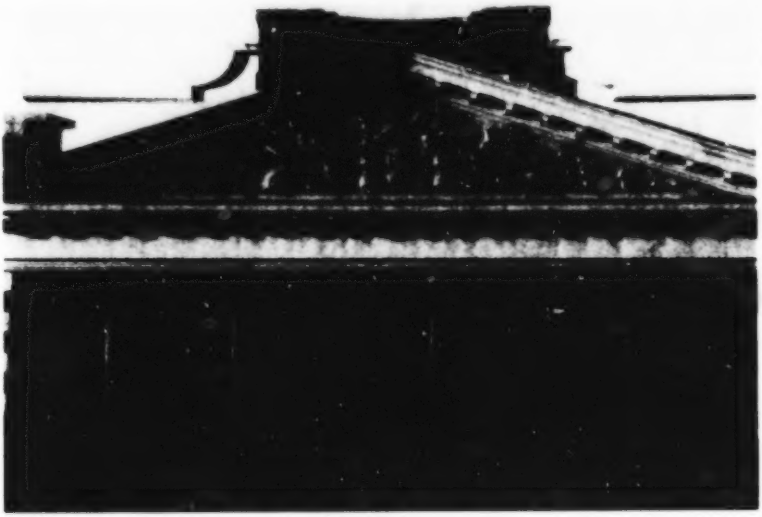
The two storey structure measured 15.24 by 13.1 metres and was constructed of reinforced concrete with brick walls and tile partitions. Four entrances led to a central octagonal rotunda from where easy access could be made to the various rooms on the first floor. These included two large classrooms with cloakrooms, a laboratory with a large conservatory, reading room and library, general business offices and private suites for teachers. The basement contained a gymnasium, manual training classroom, caretaker's quarters, boilers, fuel and fan rooms and a lavatory. The second floor contained the classrooms, a room for home economics, a museum and a large lecture hall. The exterior finish of the school, simple in design, was constructed of brick with stone trim.

Immediately to the north of the school was a parcel of ground set aside for experimental agricultural work undertaken by the students. The plants, shrubs and trees were an important feature as it was considered essential that the students at the Brandon Normal School, most of whom would teach in rural regions, should be familiar with the flora of Manitoba and how it could be used for ornamental and practical purposes. To the east of the main building were tennis courts and near the southeast corner were large flower beds and lawns as well as ornamental trees and shrubs native to the prairie region. The *Winnipeg Telegram* remarked:

> The site is a very handsome one and overlooks the city in all directions and seems designed to show the budding school teachers that school surroundings should be made as beautiful and interesting as possible. The building will include all the modern equipment, such as domestic science, manual training, gymnasium for physical instruction and the several classrooms and offices required for an up-to-date and completely modern Normal building, for the training of the teacher.

The former Brandon Normal School is similar in design to other provincial government buildings erected in regional centres such as Brandon, Minnedosa or Dauphin in the first two decades of the present century. It is a handsome, classically styled brick building. The classical detailing is exuberant in parts, especially in the pediment which presides over the main façade, and the pediment—which is wreathed, bracketed and broken—above the main entrance. Otherwise, the design of the building is restrained. Cornices and entablatures are of sheet

metal. The light coloured quoins at the corners contrast markedly with the deeper-hued bricks of the walls. Ornamental wall sconces (lighting fixtures) also serve to highlight the entrance.



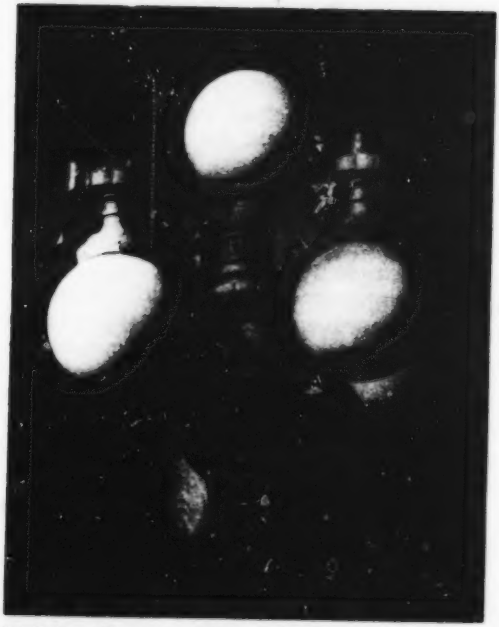
Pediment above the main entrance

The interior design of the former Normal School is extremely functional, with the classical emphasis evident in the panelled ceilings, the quarter-cut oak wainscotting and door surrounds, and the marble-tread staircase. This staircase, similar in design to those found in most of Manitoba's early courthouses, serves as an indication of the Normal School's links with other provincial buildings of the period. The top floor assembly hall, with its vaulted ceiling and proscenium arch over the stage, is one of the striking features of the building.

The 1912 fall session of the Normal School was held in a classroom of a local Brandon School, while subsequent sessions were housed in the new premises. The total enrollment for the first year of courses was 184: 37 men and 147 women. The courses offered to the third class teachers were as varied as possible; however, because of the session's short duration, class work stressed the practical aspects of education. The curriculum included lectures on education, school administration and management. Students were also instructed in primary school subjects, physical education, nature study, teacher-student observation and teaching practice. All the course work, whether it concerned educational administration or teaching methods, was directly related to the circumstances and requirements of a Manitoba country school and to the instruction of future country school teachers towards an appreciation of the rural, agricultural environment.

Historic Resources Branch

Detail of the Main Entrance



Historic Resources Branch

Lighting Sconce, Main Entrance

Expanding rural settlement, as well as a concern for continuous up-to-date teaching methods, influenced the Brandon Normal School to adopt varied and flexible teacher training courses to accommodate changing rural conditions. The system developed to serve a rural society less dominated by a frontier outlook and more concerned with providing quality in its provision of education. By 1917, extended third class courses plus a new second class teacher training course had been introduced. To deal more effectively with rural school conditions and to accompany the new courses, a one-room 'Modern Rural School' was constructed in the southwest corner of the grounds. Approximately 40 students from the Brandon area attended the Model School for short periods so that student teachers were able to teach and supervise a class resembling one from a rural environment. The Model School also had its own garden which the students and their trainee teachers cultivated, thereby further emphasizing the country traditions.

The agricultural Extension Program, under the direction of Professor T. J. Harrison from the Manitoba Agricultural College, was also introduced in 1917. Once again the accent was on the agricultural and rural, with emphasis on gardening, forestry and animal husbandry. At this time a number of children's agricultural associations, such as "The Boys and Girls Club were popular, and they were frequently attached to country schools. Prospective rural teachers were expected to encourage and participate in such local associations, whose purpose was to strengthen agricultural and rural ties. Consequently, in keeping with this movement, the Brandon Normal School pursued a policy of instructing their graduates in a manner which would instill an appreciation of life in rural Manitoba.

Benjamin J. Hales, B.A., LL.B.

Much of the credit for the Brandon Normal School's success in providing rural Manitoba with qualified teachers must go to the first principal, Benjamin J. Hales. Some idea of the regard in which he was held for his subsequent efforts, up to his retirement in 1938, can be gathered from the glowing tributes which followed his death. Bertha M. Pilling, of the Winnipeg Normal School, observed:

> With the death of Mr. Hales on Sunday, December 23rd, [1945] Manitoba lost a great educationalist, and Brandon one of its most highly respected and public spirited citizens . . . . Students and teachers who have worked with Mr. Hales will remember him with gratitude. The qualities which made him memorable—his delightful sense of humour, his wide humanity, his breadth of vision, his reasonable and unbiased viewpoint, his wealth of knowledge and experience, will influence them all their lives.

Benjamin J. Hales was born in Peterborough, Ontario, 28 November 1868 and died in Brandon at the age of 77. Hales received his early education in his home town, then attended the University of Toronto

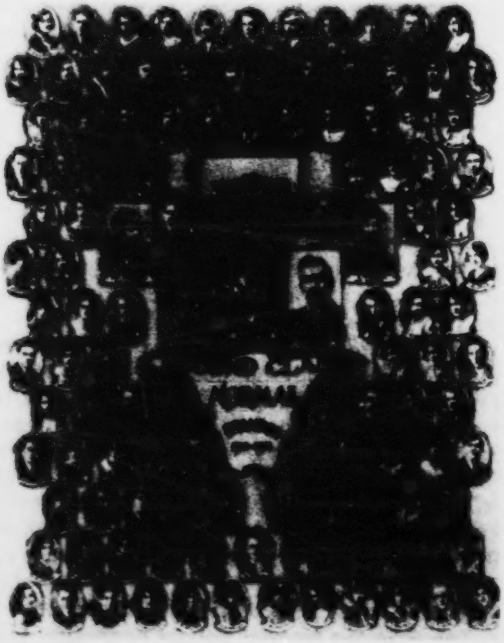
from which he received the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1894. He travelled west to teach in Manitoba, eventually obtaining a Third Class Teaching Certificate from Regina and a Bachelor of Law from the University of Manitoba, both in 1897. In the following decade Hales served as a teacher in Broadview, Saskatchewan (1897-1890), as a teacher and principal in MacGregor, Manitoba (1899-1902) and as a teacher in Hartney (1902-1907). In 1907 Hales was appointed to the Provincial Normal School staff by the Manitoba Government. Hales travelled between Brandon, Manitou and Portage la Prairie conducting short courses in teacher training from 1907 to 1911. In 1911, he settled permanently in Brandon and accepted the position of Principal of the new Brandon Normal School to be erected in 1912. Hales remained Principal of the Brandon Normal School until his retirement in June, 1938 at the age of 70. He was a prominent member of the community and played an active role in Brandon civic affairs as an Alderman on the City Council from 1920 to 1923, and as the Chairman of the City of Brandon Parks Board for 19 years.

Western School Journal, Vol. VI, No. 4. Manitoba Department of Education

**Benjamin J. Hales, Principal,
Brandon Normal School,
1911 to 1938**

During Hales' 27 year tenure as Principal of the Brandon Normal School he remained a committed teacher, instructing students in Science, Mathematics and Psychology. At a time when other influential Manitoba naturalists such as Dr. Frank Leith Skinner and Ernest Thompson Seton were attaining prominence, Hales was pursuing his avid interest in the flora and fauna of the western prairies. He not only established a reputation as an author and naturalist, but found time to organize the B. J. Hales Museum of Natural History located in Brandon. Hales corresponded extensively and exchanged specimens with many prominent naturalists in both Canada and the United States. He published three books: *Selected Western Flora,* (1915), which was authorized by the Advisory Board of the Department of Education for use in High Schools and Collegiate Institutes in Manitoba, *Forests and Trees,* (1919) and *Prairie Birds,* (1927).

Hales, with the assistance of H. L. Patmore, a well-known Brandon nurseryman, were instrumental in transforming the area surrounding the Normal School into spacious lawns and gardens. The gardens contributed significantly to the education of students and inspired other schools to landscape their school yards. Hales was especially interested in the native trees of Manitoba and was able to provide rural



Brandon Normal School, Graduating Class, 1930-31

schools with specimens of every type grown in Manitoba. Teachers in rural schools could secure not only the saplings from the Normal School Nursery but planting instructions and advice on the varieties of trees suitable for the soil, exposure and location of their particular school.

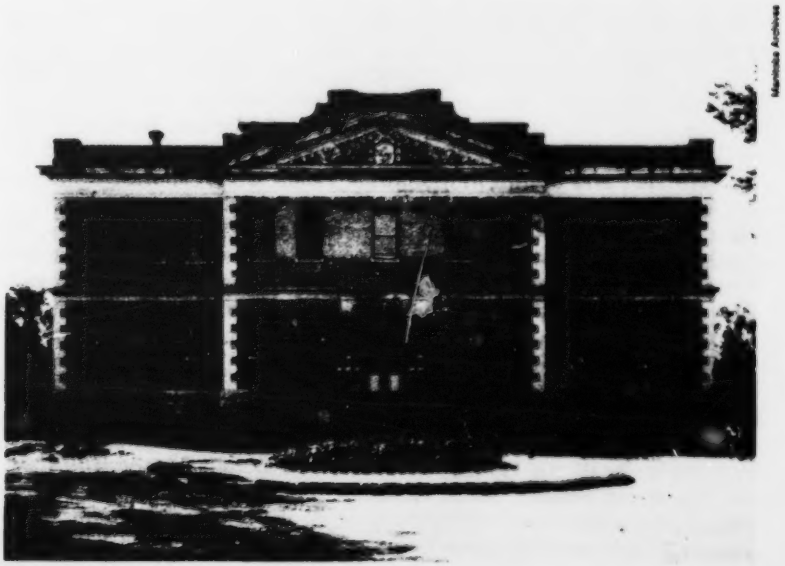
B. J. Hales was also a frequent contributor of articles and editorial commentary on varied educational issues to the *Western School Journal,* an educational publication catering to teachers. He addressed such topics as "Vocation in Education", "Program of Studies", and "Consolidation of Schools". In 1932, as President of the Manitoba Educational Association, Hales contributed one of his last and most thoughtful articles to the *Western School Journal* entitled "A Generation of Education." In this article, Hales stressed his faith in the educational system. He stated that educators had a responsibility to furnish pupils with the intelligence necessary to cope with the new difficulties of the modern world and he reaffirmed his belief that the habits and ideals acquired by the children of today, determine the achievements and principles that govern the world of tomorrow. In recognition of his far-reaching abilities as a teacher, naturalist and author, Hales was elected President of the Manitoba Educational Association in 1931 and twice elected President of the Western Teachers Association. In his honour, the Manitoba Government established, in 1938, the B. J. Hales Scholarship for students attending Normal Schools.

The B. J. Hales Museum of Natural History, now located in the basement of the Brandon University, Arts and Library Building (A. E. McKenzie Building) is a testimonial to the dedication of one man's lifelong appreciation of nature and wildlife. Hales' interest and concern for the preservation of wildlife specimens prompted him to acquire the collection of George Atkinson, a Portage la Prairie taxidermist, in 1913. The items in the Atkinson Collection formed the nucleus of what would later become the Hales Collection. Through the years Hales organized and added to the Collection which was exhibited in the Normal School. The Hales Collection was subsequently housed in various places, including Fleming School and the Brandon School Board Offices, until it was moved permanently to Brandon University in 1963 for exhibition and teaching purposes. The University took responsibility for the B. J. Hales Collection with the understanding that the public would continue to have access to the exhibits. On display is a collection of Manitoba fauna consisting of nearly 400 mounted birds representing over 250 species, and most of the major mammals. The display of Manitoba fish is being enlarged and additional displays dealing with plant life, geology and archaeology are in preparation. It also compliments the Sam Waller Little Northern Museum in The Pas which was established in February 1958 and reflects Mr. Waller's keen interest in birds and mammals.

The Later History of Brandon Normal School

The Brandon Normal School continued to operate as a centre for rural teaching instruction until 1942. Soon after, the building was taken over by the Federal Department of National Defence for military pur-

poses for the duration of World War II. After the War Manitoba suspended the functions of the Brandon Normal School. All provincial teacher education would be based at the Winnipeg Normal School, in keeping with the move toward centralized and specialized teacher training. However, the building's facilities and its central location in Western Manitoba were not overlooked. In 1946 the Manitoba Department of Agriculture established the Agricultural and Homemaking School in the former Normal School building. Students attended courses in Animal and Field Husbandry, Soil Conservation, Farm Ma-



Brandon Normal School, 1946

chinery, Farm Management and other related areas. The Homemaking Course stressed the practical side of rural living, such as health and child care, home economics, plus dairy, poultry and gardening instruction.

In 1957 the Government cancelled its Agricultural and Homemaking Course to pursue a diversified, short course educational format. A noticeable decline in student enrollment coupled with the inability of young people to leave the farm for extended periods of time were factors that necessitated alternative programs. Similarly, the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Agriculture was in the midst of developing a program of extended agricultural specialization which was proving particularly attractive.

Thus, in 1959 the Agricultural and Homemaking School was renamed the Agricultural Extension Centre and became the South-

western Manitoba Regional Office for the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. Subsequently, the educational programs offered at the school became part of the Agricultural Extension Services Branch. The aim of the Centre is to assist the farming population in developing an appreciation for agricultural specialization and efficiency tailored to local conditions.

Significance

In the early decades of this century the Brandon Normal School played an important role in the provision of teachers specifically trained to work in a rural environment. The Normal School had been established in an attempt to fill the shortage of qualified teachers which was threatening the success of Manitoba's attempt to educate children in a uniform manner. The building, which was designed by the Provincial Architect, Victor W. Horwood, is an expressive brick structure in the classical style. For nearly three decades the Brandon Normal School was dominated by its first Principal, Benjamin J. Hales, a leading educator, naturalist and author in Manitoba. Hales was responsible in great part for the School's commitment to the provision of teachers sympathetic to rural life. With the establishment of the Agricultural and Homemaking School in 1946 and the subsequent rechristening of the school to the Agricultural Extension Centre in 1959, the building continues to serve the community as an educational institution. Consequently, the Centre actively promotes the importance of agriculture and its related fields in Manitoba life.

Bibliography for Further Reading

For an introduction to the importance of education in Manitoba, and the complexity of the issues it created, see Gerald Friesen *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Keith Wilson's *The Development of Education in Manitoba* is the most important work on the subject although, unfortunately, it is a doctoral dissertation which remains unpublished. Much useful information is available in the *Annual Reports of the Department of Education* and the *Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, Extension Services*. Perhaps the most informative source is the *Western School Journal* which contains articles on all aspects of education in Manitoba, including those written by Benjamin J. Hales.

Acknowledgements

The kind assistance of Mr. Irving Bateman and Mr. Robert Doig of Brandon, Manitoba is acknowledged for providing information on the former Brandon Normal School, the life and career of Benjamin J. Hales and the B. J. Hales Museum of Natural History.

BRANDON NORMAL SCHOOL

This building was constructed in 1912-13. Designed by Victor Horwood, then Provincial Architect, the school was devoted to teacher training in Manitoba. The classically styled building was one of four Normal Schools built in Manitoba: St. Boniface (1903); Manitou (1904, demolished); and Winnipeg (1905-06).

Benjamin J. Hales was the first principal of the School. He retired in 1938, with an established reputation as an educator, author and naturalist. He founded the B. J. Hales Museum of Natural History which became permanently established at Brandon University in 1965.

The school was a centre for rural teaching instruction until 1943 when the building was occupied by the Department of National Defence during World War II. The building was turned over to the Manitoba Department of Agriculture in 1946 for its southwestern operations. It became the Agricultural Extension Centre in 1959.

THE HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY BOARD OF MANITOBA